



EDUCATION



“This ‘millennium’ generation – the 53 million children now in school – is entitled to its day in the sun. The 21st century will be very much their century, and it will be an ‘American Century’ if we educate them well. How we educate their minds and shape their values now will go a long way to defining the destiny of this nation for decades to come.”

– U.S. Secretary of Education, 1999

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EDUCATION

How is this parish doing?

Attendance	☺
Drop-outs	☺
Class size	☺
Per student expenditure	☺
Performance test scores	☹

DID YOU KNOW?

When parents with low literacy participate in literacy programs, their children's grades and test scores improve. Children's reading ability goes up, and they are less likely to drop out.

— National Institute for Literacy, 1998.

People often say, "If I had a better education, I could... ." They could have that new job or a promotion. They could afford a vacation. The higher a people's education levels, the higher their salaries, on average. 1997 U.S. Census estimates support these findings. Full-time workers aged 18 or older, with a high school degree, make \$5,000 more a year than people who did not graduate (U.S. Census, 1998). On average, people with a college degree make \$20,000 more than people who did not graduate high school. It is never too late to get an education.

Educational attainment is also related to health status. Youth who have a low commitment to school, or who drop out, are more likely to engage in risky behaviors.

This can lead to substance abuse, teen pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases and violence. Adults who have low educational attainment are less likely to have regular health insurance coverage or see a provider routinely (Chronic Disease Control Program, 1997). They are also less likely to report that their health is

good (Kawachi et al, 1999). In fact, there may be a link between low educational levels and poor lifetime health. Places with a greater proportion of residents of low educational levels also have high rates of premature death (Mansfield et al, 1999).

The Department of Education collects information about the education system in Louisiana. This kind of information includes budget and staffing, as well as the participation and abilities of students. By watching positive and negative changes in these numbers the Department of Education, parish school boards and parents can

"...the higher a person's education level, the higher his or her salary"

St. Mary Parish Public School Attendance

1996-97	93.6%
1997-98	93.5%

(1) Louisiana Department of Education, 1999.

Mid-point Earnings* by Education Level, Full-time workers, 25 years and older, US 1997

Level of Attainment	Afri-Amer Male	Afri-Amer Female	White Male	White Female	Total**
Did not graduate high school	\$20,067	\$15,084	\$25,182	\$18,254	\$20,285
High school graduate	\$25,790	\$19,993	\$31,195	\$21,602	\$25,080
Some college/ Associate's degree	\$31,474	\$26,758	\$37,164	\$27,195	\$31,013
Bachelor's degree	\$35,962	\$31,010	\$47,220	\$33,898	\$39,019
Master's degree	\$42,125	\$40,589	\$60,081	\$41,884	\$49,926

* 50% of the full-time working population make less than this amount.

** Full-time workers, 18 and over.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 1998.

make decisions about what the schools, staff and students need from year to year.

This chapter discusses student participation, class size, expense per student, the graduation exit exam and local literacy programs. Student attendance and high school drop-out



rates relate to the ability of students to receive their education. Class size and expense per student can be considered measures of investment in individual students. Test scores help people make parish-to-parish, state-level and national comparisons to assess the quality of education. Among the many tests given in school, the graduation exit exam has been selected for discussion, because it represents Louisiana's requirements for graduation. This section discusses the following indicators:

- School attendance
- High school drop-outs
- Class sizes
- Expenditure per student
- Performance test results

In order to complete the picture of education in a parish, people may want to look at the education levels of their community, teacher certification, the number of places to get an education after high school, zoning for schools and youth satisfaction with their schooling. One or two pieces of information alone will not be enough for community planners and residents to prioritize what they want to do to improve education. Combining the information collected by agencies such as the Department of Education with information community members collect can lead to a more accurate picture of a community's education status.

Taking action on these indicators is challenging. The needs of youth are well-studied. Community members often find that their decisions require a lot of information. Changing one thing, such as high school attendance, may mean change on a variety of levels in the community. Throughout this section, and in the publications of the Department of Education, factors that contribute to these indicators are emphasized and discussed.

DID YOU KNOW?

The Literacy Act defines literacy as "...an individual's ability to read, write and speak in English, compute and solve problems at levels of proficiency necessary to function on the job and in society, to achieve one's goals and develop one's knowledge and potential."

— National Institute for Literacy, 1998.

Taking Care, Taking Control: The Community Learning Center – Adult Education

The Assumption Parish Library Board recognized that the parish had one of the lowest literacy rates in the state. The Library Board felt that reading is a basic right that should be shared by all, and that as a tax-supported institution it had a responsibility to serve all citizens of the parish, not just the literate. In 1990-91, they decided something needed to be done.

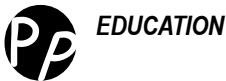
Around the same time, the "Friends of the Library" formed as a group of concerned patrons and community members who supported the work of the library. A community member, who was also on the board at the United Way, mentioned the availability of priority grants for literacy projects. They worked together and were awarded funding for three years.

The library initially launched Project Read, a one-on-

one tutoring program using the Laubauch Way to Read.

At the end of the funding cycle, the Friends of the Library applied to become a United Way agency in order to facilitate funding for the library's program and sponsor more community events around reading, arts and culture. Project Read continued growing and is now the Community Learning Center, providing library patrons with a complete learning lab. Literacy is still a priority for the center, but the lab also offers workbooks, videos and computer modules allowing for self-teaching of literacy, job skills, math, writing, critical thinking, general education diploma (GED) and adult education preparation. All programs are free to the public and are available for individuals to work at their own pace or with assistance.

For further information: Mary Judice, Napoleonville Library, 504-369-9912.

**DID YOU KNOW?**

Fifty percent of adults on welfare do not have a high school diploma or GED. Sixty percent of those adults will stay in welfare for over five years. In contrast, 65% of adults on welfare with at least a high school diploma or GED get out of the welfare system in less than two years.

— National Institute for Literacy, 1998.

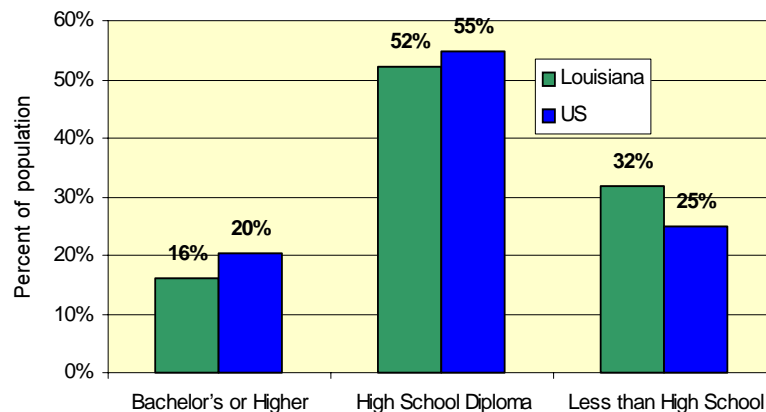
Nationally, 20% of adults read below a 5th grade reading level. That is far below the level required to earn a living wage.

— National Institute for Literacy, 1998.

Prison inmates have a much lower literacy level than the outside population. If they receive literacy education in prison, they have an 80% likelihood of not being re-incarcerated. Inmates who receive no literacy education have only a 51% chance of not returning to prison.

— National Institute for Literacy, 1998.

Figure 1
Percent of population, last grade completed,
Louisiana and the United States, 1990



Source: (2) Louisiana Department of Education, 1998.

KEEP KIDS IN SCHOOL

Attendance of students

Students need to be present in order to take advantage of what schools have to offer. Subjects such as math, science and history depend on progressive learning. Therefore, attendance throughout the school year is important. Attendance can be a measure of how well a school keeps students motivated. Attendance is also the best predictor of student performance available to the Department of Education. It is even better than standardized tests ([1] Louisiana Department of Education, 1998).

On average, 93.7 percent of Louisiana students attended school during the 1996-97 school year. The rate of attendance was 93.4 percent over the 1997-98 school year. **St. Mary had 11,239 students attending on an average day over the 1997-98 school year** ([1] Louisiana Department of Education, 1999).

High school dropouts

"In 1900, American high schools graduated 2.8 students per 1,000 children aged 5-17. This is compared to 51.2 in 1990. The change constitutes an 18-fold increase. Whereas the increase in enrollment (grades 9-12, on the same population basis) was just 10-fold. That is, these amazing improvements in completion rates outstripped dramatic improvements in enrollment rates.

"Today, completing high school has almost become a [responsibility] of citizenship. Not completing high school has become a mark of personal and institutional failure. Seldom do we consider what a profound shift this change in attitude represents for civilization—and in the lives of children and youth."

— Howley, 1999.



In this technical age, people require long and intensive educations. Completion of high school means that a person has achieved a minimum of literacy. Typically, efforts are made to reduce the number of students who might leave school. They also work on changing behaviors which lead to expulsion ([5] Louisiana Department of Education, 1997).

Expulsions and suspensions are predictive of overall school performance. Students in schools with high rates of suspension, for example, usually do worse on standardized tests than others ([3] Louisiana Department of Education, 1998). However, suspension and expulsion rates cannot be compared between districts. The incomparability is because of the ways in which policies differ. Each school district has different reasons for expulsion or suspension. Accordingly, focusing on high school drop-outs is a better indicator. It can be compared across parishes.

There are many ways to complete high school. These include special education and home-based schooling, as well as school-sponsored programs leading to a General Equivalency Diploma (GED), excluding adult GED programs ([4] Louisiana Department of Education, 1998). Because a high school diploma is key to an individual's future, it is important to know what proportion of a class completes high school.

Communities also need to know what is happening to the people who do not finish. Dropping out can result from pregnancy, disinterest in school or going to jail. It can also result from an unstable home or a priority on full-time work. The drop-out rate cannot be reduced without attention to other local, root causes as well. Some of these include the physical state of the school, quality of teaching, poverty and family cohesion. **In Louisiana over the 1997-98 school year, 10.2 percent of students enrolled in grades 9 through 12 dropped out of high school** ([1] Louisiana Department of Education, 1999).

INVEST IN EACH CHILD

Make class sizes smaller

The State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) has recommended class sizes for each education level. Kindergarten through 3rd grade should have no more than 26 students, and grades four through 12 should have no more than 33 students in a classroom ([1] Department of Education, 1998). Class size does not represent the student-to-teacher ratio. Resource teachers and others who lend support are included in the student-to-teacher ratio. But they are not included in class size. Of course, the quality of teaching can not be forgotten. Some teachers may be able to challenge and inspire larger groups of students more than others. In areas where the chance of

DID YOU KNOW?

Poor school performance is highly correlated with:

- Family poverty;
- Lower levels of parental education;
- Lower levels of parental involvement;
- Primary language other than English;
- And a mother who is unmarried at the time of the child's birth.

Nationally, 50% of today's preschoolers are affected by at least one of these risk factors. Meanwhile, 15% are affected by three or more of these factors.

- Zill, 1995.

St. Mary Parish Public High School Drop-outs

1996-97	7.9%
1997-98	8.0%

Source: (1) Louisiana Department of Education, 1999.

Percent of Schools by Class Size, Louisiana, 1997-98

1-20 students	34.4%
21-26 students	39.4%
27+ students	26.2%

Source: (1) Louisiana Department of Education, 1999.



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DID YOU KNOW?

According to the Louisiana Department of Education, 95.5% of classroom teachers have a bachelor's degree or higher. Their average salary over the 1997-98 school year was \$31,131.

- (2) Louisiana Department of Education, 1999.

reducing class size is slim, it would pay to help teachers do their jobs better ([5] Louisiana Department of Education, 1997).

IMPROVE EXPENDITURES PER STUDENT

Educational quality really can not be quantified by one number. However, cost per student can indicate something about the quality of education. This is why access to an itemized budget is important. In this way, community members can understand what services this expense provides. It is possible that even where the cost per student may be lower than the state average, students will still perform well. This may be because their classes are small. Or it may be because their attendance is high. Nationally, schools are estimated to have spent an average of \$5,911 per student in 1997-98 ([2] Louisiana Department of Education, 1999). Louisiana spent \$5,584 per student within the public school system over the 1997-98 school year ([1] Louisiana Department of Education, 1999). **St. Mary Parish spent \$6,100 per student over the 1997-98 school year** ([1] Louisiana Department of Education, 1999).

MONITOR THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION

Performance test results

The Louisiana Department of Education gives several different statewide assessment programs. The Louisiana Educational Assessment Program for the 21st Century (LEAP 21) is the state criterion-referenced test based on the new content standards. The test is given to all 4th and 8th graders in the subject areas of English, mathematics, science and social studies. It measures how well students have mastered the new state standards.

Classes with 27+ students

Louisiana	
1996-97	27.3%
1997-98	26.2%
St. Mary	
1996-97	15.3%
1997-98	14.4%

Source: (1) Louisiana Department of Education, 1999.

For the norm-referenced testing program, Louisiana has adopted the Iowa Tests at grades three, five, six, seven and nine. Norm-referenced tests measure how well students perform against a national comparison group. The major subtests are reading, language and mathematics.

Graduation Exit Exam Scores St. Mary and Louisiana, 1996-97, 1997-98

	Louisiana		St. Mary	
	1996-97	1997-98	1996-97	1997-98
Language Arts	84	87	86	86
Math	77	76	77	73
Written Comp.	93	95	95	95
Science	82	84	84	88
Social Studies	88	88	88	88

Source: (1) Louisiana Department of Education, 1999.

High school students participate in the Graduation Exit Examination (GEE). Currently, students must pass all five components and earn 23 Carnegie units in order to receive a high school diploma. The GEE



tests are writing, english, mathematics, science and social studies ([2] Louisiana Department of Education, 1999).

EDUCATE ADULTS

The link between health and educational attainment is clear in adults. People with lower educational levels are less likely to know about health prevention steps, such as screenings. When they are ill, poor reading skills may prevent clear understanding of their treatments (National Institute for Literacy, 1999).

It is never too late for people to add to their educational status. There are plenty of reasons to invest in further education. The most important reason may be children. Just by watching parents go to classes and study, young people can become better students themselves. Ultimately, further education for adults can help the children.

DID YOU KNOW?

In 1997 in the United States, 67% of recent high school completers not enrolled in college were employed, compared with 45% of recent high school drop-outs.

- (2) National Center for Education Statistics, 1998.

THE COMMUNITY CAN ...

❶ **Keep kids in school**

- Spend time helping children learn to read. Not all kids learn the same way, or at the same speed. It may require patience. Communities may want to invite speakers to talk about learning to read or plan story telling and reading times.

❷ **Invest in each child**

- Help them with their homework!
- Be involved with the decisions of your school board and your PTA. All the information about your school system, from budget and salaries to student performance, is available to you through the Department of Education or through your local school board [see "Resources" chapter]. Using more detailed information, you can advocate for the change you believe is needed.

❸ **Educate adults**

- Encourage adults to get into or continue literacy programs. People who read well can help others learn to read or improve their reading. Start literacy programs at community centers, churches and libraries. Most libraries host or know about adult reading groups.
- When you are writing for an adult audience, don't forget to keep it simple. Do this unless you are sure your readers read at high levels. The reading level that is recommended for Louisiana is fifth grade.

Forty three percent of people with the lowest literacy skills live in poverty. Seventeen percent receive food stamps and 70% do not have a full-time job.

- National Institute for Literacy, 1998.



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